If You Hear Something Late at Night by blackberry_tarts

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Summary:

You hear them late at night. The yelling, the thumps, and the pleas. But it's not your problem.

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If You Hear Something Late at Night

Author's Note:

TW/CW: Child abuse (and people not helping) is the focus of this story. The F-slur is mentioned/used a few times.
Your mental health is more important than fanfiction. If any of these topics will trigger you, please do not continue!
Please let me know if I need to add any tags or change the rating.

This story is narrated in second person, but is not a self-insert. I never write in second person, so I wanted to try it. The narrator is a woman around Susan's age that lives in an apartment building along with the Hargrove-Mayfield family.

Title is from/Song this is based off: Luka by Suzanne Vega

My name is Luka
I live on the second floor
I live upstairs from you
Yes I think you've seen me before

You know the Mayfields. They live directly above you. The Hargroves moved in with Susan about a month ago. From a trailer park, if gossips are to be believed. Not that the rundown apartment building you live in is much better, but a *trailer park*. It makes you shudder to think about it.

Susan is a lovely lady, if a bit paranoid. You've had her around for

lunch occasionally. She's tall in stature but small in personality. Her daughter, Max, is a budding skateboarder and is snappy but sweet, like the bubblegum she loves to chew.

You don't know the Hargroves as well, yet. Billy seems to be a very polite young man, despite his rebellious appearance. He's a bit flirty though, which concerns you. He's only in middle school. Twelve? Thirteen? Neil is a veteran, from 'Nam, and looks sharp and clean. He's always ordering Billy around, but seems kind enough to Max.

If you hear something late at night
Some kind of trouble, some kind of fight
Just don't ask me what it was
Just don't ask me what it was
Just don't ask me what it was

You're starting to hear odd thumps and yelling coming from upstairs. You chalk the thumps up to Susan and Neil being newlyweds and doing... the thing. And the yelling is probably just from a normal fight. You think you heard a man yelling "faggot," but you're not sure. After all, when you were a teenager, you fought with your parents often.

Then you see Billy the next day, and he's got a black eye and is moving stiffly. What Neil's doing isn't right, you know that, but it's none of your business how a man disciplines his son. So you don't ask, you don't tell.

I think it's because I'm clumsy
I try not to talk too loud
Maybe it's because I'm crazy
I try not to act too proud

Neil catches you looking at a split on Billy's lip one afternoon, and

nudges Billy. He walks up to you with a charming smile, stretching the cut. "How are you, ma'am?"

"I-I'm fine, thank you. How are you?" you say, still focused on the bloody split.

"Fine, fine. Walked into a locker today at school, though. Lip's still a bit sore."

It's hard to tell that he's lying. He must have practice. The thought sickens you. Suddenly, you feel a need to get out of there. You don't want to get involved in this. "That's unfortunate, Billy. It was nice seeing you and your dad today, but I need to go."

He's already turning around, and tosses a "See ya" over his shoulder.

They only hit until you cry
And after that you don't ask why
You just don't argue anymore
You just don't argue anymore
You just don't argue anymore

You've made a new recipe for a pie, and decide to share it with Susan. She's been down a little, recently, and you remember that she always enjoyed making desserts with Max. As you near the door of their apartment, you start hearing something. A voice.

"Sorry, sir- I'm sorry, dad! Please-"

You walk back downstairs. It doesn't seem like the best time.

Maybe you'll come back later, and Neil will open the door, and you'll see his split knuckles. You'll see the belt draped over the couch, speckles of blood glittering on the metallic buckle, and maybe you'll decide that this is bad. Very bad. The evidence will be right there, taunting you. And maybe you'll find the courage to tell someone that can help.

But you don't come back later. So you don't see, you don't tell.

Yes I think I'm okay
I walked into the door again
If you ask that's what I'll say
And it's not your business anyway

You keep seeing him with more and more odd bruises and cuts, and you could swear you saw welts curling across his back once when his shirt rode up. You try asking about it a couple times, thinking that it's not going to get you too involved with... whatever is going on, but all his answers are some variant of "Got into a fight" or "Walked into the door again. I'm just clumsy, it's nothing" with a sheepish smile.

I guess I'd like to be alone
With nothing broken, nothing thrown
Just don't ask me how I am
Just don't ask me how I am
Just don't ask me how I am

You hear something shatter one night, and the next day, Billy shows up with a gash on his arm. Another night, there's the sound of aluminium--like cans of beer--bouncing off something solid, and when you bump into him on the stairwell a few hours later, Billy has a lump on his forehead.

You console yourself by thinking that Billy must've gotten into trouble at school. Billy must've talked back to his father. Billy must've gotten bad grades. Billy must've pulled Max's hair. Billy must've...

My name is Luka
I live on the second floor

I live upstairs from you
Yes I think you've seen me before

It's been half a year, now. The Hargrove-Mayfield's still live upstairs. Max is still sweet and still skateboarding. Susan is still nervous and still fills her day with magazines. Billy is still polite and still covered in injuries. And Neil... you really don't know what to think about him.

Noises still come from upstairs. The TV blaring news, the clash of pots and pans while one cooks, pained yells, Max indistinctly chattering, the opening tunes of *The Smurfs*, that new cartoon that all the kids like, and the peculiar thumps.

You keep up the chorus of *Billy must've, Billy must've*.

If you hear something late at night
Some kind of trouble, some kind of fight
Just don't ask me what it was
Just don't ask me what it was
Just don't ask me what it was

Every night, just like clockwork, the thumps start. *Thump.* A cry. *Thump.* A plea. *Thump. Thump. Thump.*

But you don't ask, you don't tell. What use would it do anyways? When you were little, there was a boy on your block. He always had tons of bruises on him, so you told your father who told the police. A few days later, the boy was leaving in a body bag. Besides, really don't want to get involved in some long, complex investigation. Too much trouble. You've got your own issues to worry about. Everyone else shares the same thoughts, it seems.

It's not your problem anyways.

They only hit until you cry
And after that you don't ask why
You just don't argue anymore
You just don't argue anymore
You just don't argue anymore

It's been four years since the Hargroves moved in with the Mayfields.

You bump into Max in the lobby. She's red-faced and breathing hard, and crashes right into you, knocking over the boxes you were carrying.

"Sorry," she puffs out. "No time!"

That night, something happens in Apartment 204, the one right above Apartment 104. No one knows what, but the screams and thumps were louder and went on for longer than usual. The roar of *faggot!* is clearly heard. Then sirens sound, and take the battered boy away in an ambulance. The gossips talk about how Neil spun a tale about how he had found Billy crumpled in the doorway, bloodied and bruised. It's bullshit, and everyone knows it.

But it's none of their business how a man disciplines his son. Never has been.

The family moves away--to *Indiana*, the gossips squeal--two weeks later, as soon as their son is discharged from the hospital.

A few years later, the longtime residents of the apartment building are gathered together in your kitchen, playing cards. The radio's on, and a song that feels oddly familiar to them starts playing. *"My name is Luka. I live on the second floor."*

You know that everyone is thinking of Billy, sauntering up to the ladies, wary around the men, but shaking their hand all the same, saying "My name is Billy. I live on the second floor."

You wonder what happened to him.

Author's Note:

Thank you so much for reading! A kudos or maybe even a comment would go a long way.

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